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ENQUIRY
INTO
THE PRINCIPLES
OF
FREE TRADE.

BY
JOHN ALEXANDER NEALE, D.C.L.
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SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:
P. S. KING & SON, PARLIAMENTARY AGENCY,
ORCHARD HOUSE, WESTMINSTER, S.W.
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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

SOME nineteen years ago, alas! I held my own cabinet enquiry into the subject of free trade, and published the following pamphlet under the title appearing thereon. The question having been once again brought to the public notice by a strenuous thinker and a man of superlative eminence in action, I have determined to publish a second edition, in the hope that it may assist in the inquest which is being held, and aid in ever so slight a degree in the destruction of error, the promotion of truth, and the amelioration of the condition of the multitude of our fellow-countrymen, who I am confident have long endured grievous ills from a most pernicious doctrine, which embodies one of the rankest impostures ever foisted upon suffering mankind. My first intention was to revise it, but I have concluded that it would, on the whole, be best to leave it untouched, and send it forth again with all its imperfections on its head, asking my indulgent readers (if I should find any) to make some allowance for the years that have passed and for faults attributable it may be to the impetuosity, or even the indiscretions, of more youthful days. The meaning of some allusions will not be apparent to many, and were nearly forgotten by myself; and the extreme severity of the agricultural depression of those days, the methods of the Caucus and Lloyd George's crusade against all property, are now fast fading from the memory of most of us. Where were our Professors of Political Economy then, with their hide-bound notions? Possessing neither the energy to exterminate a lie nor the genius to formulate a new truth, they have been as Charlemagne in his dismal tomb, seated on his chair of state from age to age stone dead: and they would now have us suppose

that the free trade of their imagining is the very ark of the covenant, and that whosoever shall not reverently approach it shall die. But their idol is as impotent as Baal, though the high priests thereof should in their fury cut themselves with lances and leap upon the altar of their speechless god. Let them take heed of the prophet's righteous vengeance. He may yet call them to an account of their stewardship, and he has a long-reaching arm which can and will, when challenged, strike hip and thigh.

The Duke of Devonshire, perhaps the wisest of living men, has said : "What a real free trader exacts is a free interchange of all commodities between all nations," and "we are not free traders because we have not got free trade." This declaration is quite simple, clear, and intelligible, as most truths are ; and there is no mystery, no contradictory, loop-holing reservation about it, because that is unnecessary. When we are all at length agreed upon what free trade really is, we shall probably also agree in thinking that in this very imperfect world, as men will have it, salvation is not to be found either in 'free trade' or in 'protection,' but in the discovery of that happy mean and middle course which the dear and gentle friends and counsellors of school-boy days taught us to regard as the safest way of all.

In September, 1885, on the eve of a momentous general election, I addressed the general elector as follows :—"At home the country is rapidly approaching the brink of commercial and industrial ruin through the most insane disregard of the simplest and plainest principles of commercial intercourse. Capital and industry are crushed and borne down with the most iniquitous burdens, either because men, when they have comprehended that they have made a mistake, persist in adhering to it and are not magnanimous enough to confess their error, or because they prefer continuing in folly to getting understanding. Free trade has been freely preached but never freely practised ; and it has at length become a question of life and death that you should demand and have no half measures, but free trade in its plenitude or not at all. The bare-faced imposture of a free trade, which has been palmed off upon you all these years, has been used too long

as a cloak by designing men to sacrifice one class of the community for the sake of another, with the inevitable and intolerable result that all classes are at last suffering alike, while the foreigner steps in, and, like the fox in the fable, walks off with the prize, making no kind of return, laughing up his sleeve at Englishmen's unexampled simplicity, and growing fat at the Englishman's expense. You know well that you are being deceived, and that your own kith and kin are being taxed that the foreigner may go free. This is as plain as daylight to all but the wilfully blind. The public mind must be cleansed of all the perilous so-called Cobden stuff that weighs upon the nation like the globe on the shoulders of Atlas. It rests with you to declare that you will no longer endure to be mocked with a shadow and denied the substance; and that principles shall no longer be ignored while the plainest justice is denied to your brethren and your flesh." My readers can decide for themselves whether I was in these earlier days mistaken or not.

I further went on to add in regard to our Colonies what is specially pertinent at this moment to the question in hand:—"In our Colonial policy we should accept with pride and cheerfulness the hegemony which is rightfully ours by common consent; we should welcome, and not meet with unmannerly rebuffs, Colonies that approach us for friendly counsel or assistance, and we should bind them to us fast by gratitude as well as by the bond of a common race and tongue, remembering that England is no longer bounded by her own shores, and that she cannot sever herself from the Greater England beyond the seas or renounce her empire without ceasing to be the England she is and becoming as naught among the nations of the world. This she will never consent to do. This England, even yet the envy of the world, is your possession; yours to make or to mar it. It will be honour to you to construct, your lasting infamy and disgrace to destroy." I venture to assert that the great majority of our fellow-countrymen are seriously thinking somewhat on such lines as these to-day.

I propose, should there be no obstacle in the way, to publish shortly the correspondence which took place in 1884 between the

late Dr. Bonamy Price, then Professor of Political Economy of the University of Oxford, and myself, with reference to the following pamphlet, in which he gave his definition of 'free trade' and admitted the justice of the views put forward by me with regard to the way in which British agriculture was then being unjustly oppressed and penalised by the existing system of free imports on the one hand and hostile tariffs on the other.

I add, by way of appendix, my letter of 29th September, 1903, to the Professor of Political Economy at the University of Oxford and his co-signatories upon their joint manifesto in the *Times* of 15th August, 1903.

J. A. N.

42, HALF-MOON STREET, W.

1st October, 1903.

AN ENQUIRY
INTO
THE PRINCIPLES
OF
FREE TRADE.

THERE is perhaps no question which at the present time more perplexes the public mind than the question of free trade, or as to which the public mind is more desirous of being instructed, so that it may be able to come to definite and certain conclusions with regard to it. There is, however, one thing quite clear, which is, that free trade according to usage and convention is a very different thing from free trade in fact.

The only man of any real note who makes the subject a common topic is Mr. Bright ; and though he speaks on the subject in one uniform and wearisome strain, we look to him in vain for light. He dogmatises, but does not condescend to explain ; strong in his orthodoxy, he puts aside all arguments, and, terrible as a bear robbed of her whelps, girds at adversaries who dare to confront him, with the strongest language at his command. We are, consequently, almost led to doubt whether Mr. Bright

has really ever seriously thought out the subject. He would almost appear not to have done so, or, having commenced to do, to have been beset by some awkward misgivings. Why else is he so very reluctant to explain to us the whole thing? When the spirit moves him, he can without effort fill column upon column of the daily newspapers; why then will he not devote a single column to the perfect elucidation of this gospel which he has been proclaiming for upwards of a quarter of a century, and which he has nevertheless failed to make people understand even yet? And so simple, too, does it appear to him, that they are declared to be fools, or worse, who do not understand it, even without explanation. Why, if there is no difficulty, does he delegate this task to some inferior, and like a good-for-nothing cock, without having won the victory, walk away from the argument, and crow?

Having referred us to Mr. Mongredien, Mr. Bright must be presumed to adopt Mr. Mongredien's statement of the subject; but when we come presently to a consideration of Mr. Mongredien's work, it will be found that it too is little calculated to convince, and that it contributes next to nothing to the real solution of the difficulty.

Mr. Bright is an idealist, but idealists cannot be taken as practical guides; they have at all times a just claim to be honoured in so far as they set up ideals for men to aim at, though they may not at the moment be actually attainable: but it must not be forgotten that ideals are immediately suited only to

an ideal state of things, which is seldom or ever the actual state of things. Socrates constantly recognised this, and Mr. Bright might gain in reputation if he did so also.

The Liberals as a body are ominously and significantly silent about free trade. It may be that they too have misgivings, and mistrust the validity of the principles upon which they have been accustomed to plume themselves and even to stake their credit, and that they are somewhat at a loss for the answer which they shall make for this faith of theirs. Still an answer should be required of them, and should be frankly and promptly given.

When Conservatives speak, they do so as a rule with hesitation and timidity. Mr. James Lowther, it is true, has convictions and the courage of them; and Lord Salisbury will be thought by many to have pricked the business with the needle's point, in the following words:—

“Reciprocity, called by some retaliation, has of late years excited very great interest among the masses. They see the undoubted fact that a wall of tariffs exists around their trade, and that they do not diminish in severity, but that they tend to grow more and more severe. They also see that we are isolated in the matter among the nations of the world, and that the promises and the sincere convictions under which the system of free trade was originally passed have not been fulfilled, and that other nations have not followed our example.”

Let it be assumed, as most men do assume, that free trade is as a principle wholesome and unexceptionable; still if we put the principle in practice regardless of surrounding circumstances, flying in the face of all

instruction, we perpetrate the every-day fallacy of "*secundum quid*," and the festering lily of free trade becomes far worse than the weed reciprocity.

It is customary to invoke the name of Cobden in support of the free trade doctrine. Mr. Cobden started from a clear and intelligible principle: but for the enunciation of a clear and intelligible principle we look in vain to his mistaken disciples, who appear to be unable to render a reason and to be wise only in their own overweening conceit. If the truth could be known, it is only natural to suppose that Mr. Cobden's first concern would be, now as in the past, not for doctrinaire notions and the preservation of the ideas of an outworn age, but for the well-being of the struggling masses of his fellow-countrymen to whom Lord Salisbury has made reference. Be that as it may, the mere name even of a Cobden is not binding on us, but reason only.

Mr. Bright and his school are accustomed to treat of free trade as a party question and to take credit to themselves for their attitude with regard to it in the present and the past. Whatever credit may be theirs in the past, there is small ground for congratulation in the present. Constant retrospects are idle or worse than idle in the presence of a gathering crisis, and the flaunting of party triumphs becomes a solemn trifling in the eyes of a suffering and despairing people.

Now if we are not to look for instruction to the recognised champion of free trade, where are we to turn for it? Mr. Bright has said, to Mr. Mongredien. As we shall presently see, and as already hinted, we

turn to him too in vain :—he gives forth no dry light but vapour abundant, piles up gaunt pyramids of figures and produces a plethora of statistics, starts with assuming the very thing we long to have proved, glibly argues after the manner of free-traders in a monotonous circle, leaving his readers, like the rollicking knights of Nassau, somewhat more confused, but, so far as the principles of free trade are concerned, no wiser than they were before.

But if Mr. Bright and Mr. Mongredien fail us, to whom next are we to go ? The well-known professor of Political Economy, Mr. Thorold Rogers, is not an unprejudiced arbitrator : a man who does not shrink from reasserting, for instance, in the teeth of all experience to the contrary, the somewhat stale proposition that, in a progressive state of society, land is the only article the value of which constantly and invariably increases (as though it were an axiom of the highest generality and validity), cannot command confidence, for he exhibits the vices of a partisan and prejudges vital matters, as partisans do, to his infinite discredit.

John Stuart Mill has approached the subject, if not without bias, at any rate with philosophic calm, and to his views reference will be made later on.

Now it will scarcely be disputed that in recent years grave doubts have sprung up in the minds of very many men with regard to the present practice and the principles of free trade, some men going the length even of asserting in effect that our conventional free trade is founded upon an entirely gratuitous

and unverified hypothesis ; and the question being one of such far-reaching importance, the necessity for clearing up these doubts has become one of great urgency. Free trade has long been looked upon as a maxim, the reasons and evidence of which have been in large measure lost sight of ; but no less authority than Mill himself has pointed out that in the complicated affairs of life, and still more in those of States and societies, rules cannot be relied on without constantly referring back to the scientific laws on which they are founded.

Thirty or forty years ago free trade was merely a large inference. It frequently happens in nature that within a limited sphere certain causes are invariably followed by certain effects. Men thereupon draw the inference that what is true in the limited sphere must also be true in the more extended sphere. So it has happened with free trade. It was asserted (with how much truth we are not now concerned to enquire) that free trade in corn, or to be more exact, the importation of corn duty free (which it will be seen is a very different thing from free trade in corn) was in accordance with sound principles of political economy. When the corn laws had been passed, people began thereupon to infer that free trade in all other things, or rather the admission of all other imports duty free was equally sound in principle ; and they very soon set about giving effect to this opinion in accordance with what they erroneously conceived at the time free trade to be. As then serious questionings have in later times arisen as to

the truth of this larger inference, as well as the premises from which it starts, free-traders should, according to the teaching even of their own school, long ago, with modesty, though with confidence, have submitted the axioms of their science to the severest scrutiny and test. But free-traders, it is to be regretted, have their weaknesses like other men, and lack that conscious humility which is a trait only of the greatest; and so they not only refuse to admit errors, but too often do offence to their godlike attributes and refuse even to think.

Our would-be teachers, untutored by every-day experience, appear also to imagine that they can take a short cut to knowledge by lecturing on free trade in the abstract; and so venturing forth, as sometimes happens, in the strength of professional authority, would fain carry the world along with them. As well might men attempt to learn the military art from professors who have never been in the field, or a patient be handed over to the tender mercies of a surgeon who has never plied the scalpel. The wish was father to the thought, when Bentham wrote, that as experience had increased, authority had been gradually set aside, and reasoning drawn from facts and guided by reference to the end in view, true or false, had taken its place. Now a days wind-bags win, not reasoning or sense.

We cannot but feel that our professors ought, at least, to have told us a little more plainly than they have yet done, what free trade really is; how it is that we are all (that is to say, some of us) so

desperately at sea about it ; how it falls out that under the glorious dispensation of free trade the times are so much out of joint ; or why we (that is to say, some of us) perversely so think. Is it that political economy in the hands of its professors has not attained to the rank of a science and cannot explain ? Or is it that the professors of it, having hazarded in the past authoritative opinions, which have not stood the test of time, but which have been hopelessly exploded, have now resolved to maintain a becoming silence ?

There is a suspicion that political economists have, as a rule, somehow become possessed of peculiar notions, with regard to land and English landlords, which appear to have warped their understanding, and tainted their opinions upon almost every branch of their science, to such an extent as to well-nigh wholly incapacitate them for the dispassionate and fair treatment of the subject. If these notions had been confined to the lecture-room very little harm might have come of them ; but, unfortunately, they have received support out of doors, and, as they have not been without influence on the course of free trade, it may not be out of place to advert shortly to this subject. It is suggested that the landlord is the one man who toils not, neither spins, and that most, if not all, the wrongs and sufferings of the masses of the people are to be laid at his door. Apart from the fact that this statement of the case is a somewhat bare-faced breach of the ninth commandment, the reasoning of it is not intelligible. One would suppose that landlords were a privileged sect. The contrary, however, is well

known to be the truth. Anyone whatever may enter the sacred circle ; indeed, a man may become a land-owner with ten times greater ease and freedom than he can fight his way through opposition and jealousy into the rank of a successful merchant or manufacturer. The possession of land has no doubt been said to carry with it a big reputation, but the privilege of landlords, if privilege it be,^r will be found to consist in a great measure in having to assume duties and burdens which do not fall to the share of other men. Landlords do not beyond other men require a special defence to be raised on their behalf, and, indeed, it would not be a difficult task to prove that the community at large owe a greater debt of gratitude to and have been laid under greater obligations by them than any other class of men, whether merchants or manufacturers, or whatever they may be. It may appear strange, but land-owners are even an integral portion of the community, though not it may be to the extent that free-traders and manufacturers are ; and it remains to be seen, when the much-abused landlord has, like a well-graced actor, left the stage, and an unnatural State has devoured her own children that so she may become lady paramount, whether tenants and labouring men, in times of adversity, will find in her an over-indulgent foster-mother. Let them look to it in time, and not cry out when it is too late, and they are deceived.

This groundless crusade against a class is but a new illustration of Menenius Agrippa's fable of the belly and the members ; member starts up in insane

opposition to member and big-toe forsooth must needs be a grumbling blustering agitator. One might even suppose that there lurked some deadly and impious conspiracy against the very soil whereon grow grain and herb for man and beast. The lap of nature is being rifled; her face is haggard and distressed, and her beauty is clouded over as by some crooked eclipse; the fields do not, as we once remember them, yield their meat; the flocks are cut off from the fold, the herd from the stall. Those whose sad lot it is to know, will recognise in these words not a mere flight of intoxicated fancy, but a lamentable tale of sober fact; and they have begun to suspect, as the truth is, that this free trade imposture is at the bottom of it and no small part of the guilty cause.

But since the gage of battle is thrown down, we may just pause to enquire how manufacturers and merchants have performed their duty towards those who are dependent on them. Many have grown rich beyond the dreams of avarice by the sweat of men who have day by day left their work and gone back from palatial factory or warehouse to the wretched hovels which are called their homes. Have their masters in every case followed them thither, not in bodily presence, but even in silent thought, to look to their needs and to help with human sympathy if with nothing else? Without doubt there has been grievous neglect, and we need not perhaps be greatly surprised if, when the chief offenders are on the point of being found out, they should, with more than the astuteness and audacity of a Cleon, cast about how they may

shift their own responsibilities on to other shoulders. And so it comes about that landlords are to be very politely told that they are far worse than common thieves. These unmannerly sayings, it is true, defile not the objects but the author of them; and the demigods complained of the Pious Æneas that he was always of opinion that everybody ought to have been damned except himself. Then, splendid contradiction! the poor man's champion and the indignant unspotted moralist cynically supplants freedom and plants on freedom's sacred soil an odious and outlandish tyranny, that so he may steal away from his unhappy *protégé* dear conscience and the right of opinion, reducing him to the level of dummy, block-head and nonentity. What a consummation! What a hideous descent from the gifted soul who said

“For me, I deem an absolute autocrat
Not a barbarian, but much worse than that—

* * * * *

“—I wish men to be free
As much from mobs as kings—from you as me.”

and declared his

“plain, sworn, downright detestation
Of every despotism in every nation.”

It is not by nursing such as this that Birmingham has been built up or will retain her blushing honours; it emasculates political manhood and is more suited to the distorted and distorting education of tender females of the Celestial Empire than meet for men of the metropolis of hardware: and if the city of the mural crown be but true to her just instincts and

herself, she will be among the foremost to break the yoke and unfurl the banner of resolute revolt.

Free trade is wont to be proclaimed as embodying some great and glorious principle, but in the practice of it no principle whatever is observed ; and this non-observance of and want of regard for principle is fraught with direful consequences which meet us at every turn. It is this pretence of a free trade more than aught else that breeds the neglected waifs that crowd our streets, multiplies the pitiable sandwich men and such-like human wrecks, and is a chief cause of still worse forms of unspeakable social degradation. Life and good, and death and evil, have been set before us ; and our rulers, with blind and fatal infatuation, have chosen and are choosing for us the latter.

Men possessing a grain of patriotism surely do not wish to see their country drift and relapse into Paganism, as places and peoples have relapsed in times gone by. Many a Christian temple, monument of ancient faith and nobility, is a witness to this, even in our own country ; its walls crumbling for the lack even of the means and power to repair them, standing like some darkened lantern in a waste with its light gone out.

Men have been accustomed to look to Mr. Bright as a man of light and leading in these matters. A very great thinker once said that a man should know what he is advising about or his counsel will come to naught, and that people imagine that they know about the nature of things when they don't know about them.

If Mr. Bright really does know about free trade, and is able to advise about it, he would appear to be callously indifferent to other people remaining in ignorance on the subject. How else is it that he seeks frequent occasion to lavish enthymeme and anathema upon opponents, but declines demonstration altogether, ignominiously retreating like a cuttlefish under cover of darkness of his own creation, content to snatch at a momentary reputation rather than become a beacon-light for all time. Again and again he blows big his iridescent bubble of free trade, only that it may burst in an instant and its hollow splendour perish everlastingly, leaving his confounded followers none the wiser or better off than they were before, and turning their sugared tongue to bitter wormwood taste.

But we are being daily reminded that, as was said long ages ago, there are some men whom the applause of the multitude delude into the belief that they are really statesmen, and that these men are not much to be admired; and that when a man cannot measure, and a great many others who cannot measure, declare that he is four cubits high, it is very difficult indeed for that man not to help believing what they say. If our teachers would but humble themselves just a little, and go at seasons for inspiration to the great men of old, they would doubtless bring a blessing and plentiful oil in their lamps away with them.

The object with which this is written is not to make an attack upon free trade, the true principles of which are believed to be sound and admirable, but to point

out in what respects the prevalent ideas with regard to it are false and logically untenable, and how infinitely more to the advantage of everyone concerned it would be, that a right rather than a wrong conception of it should obtain, and that our practice should conform thereto.

It has been said on high authority that every general name should have a meaning steadily fixed and precisely determined. The meaning of the term free trade has however not been steadily fixed or precisely determined. On the contrary it has been employed to represent all sorts of vague ideas which are generally in direct contradiction to its true meaning. It has also as a rule been used not so much to conceal thought as to mask the absence of precise ideas. Free trade, as commonly understood and as permanently acquiesced in by free traders, furnishes a striking instance of the baleful class of "*notiones temere abstractæ*," against which Bacon would seem to have warned mankind long ago in vain.

But let us consider shortly what Mr. Mongredien, to whom Mr. Bright has particularly referred us, and upon whose book the Cobden Club have placed the seal of their approval, has to say upon the subject.

Being intended for popular instruction, we should have expected to find his book simple, direct, concise, and convincing; it is neither: it is from first to last a faggot of *petitiones principiï*, full of assumptions of the identical things which we are expecting him to prove. He starts with the statement of abstruse propositions, which are the common-place

platitudes of writers on the subject, and repeats them *ad nauseam*, with the result that anything more slipshod or ill-digested cannot well be imagined, and only the faintest possible trace is to be found of "the inexorable law of logical sequence," to which with all gravity he appeals. His arguments can scarcely be said to be at any time profound, and such statements as, for instance, that "wishing to sell without buying, is equivalent to the old paradox of a valley without a mountain," transgresses the limits of sense.

The following may be given as examples of the kind of propositions which he has thought it sufficient to put forward without any serious attempt at proof:—

1. The more goods a country exports, the more goods, in the same proportion, it must import.

2. Gold and silver coins are merely counters, and a country would be no richer with £2,000,000 in coin than with £1,000,000.

3. Payments by one country to another must be in goods; and exports must be paid for in goods.

4. If free trade between the inhabitants of one *county* and another (who, it may be pointed out, have common interests) is advantageous, free trade must also be advantageous between different *countries* (whose interests, on the contrary, be it observed, are usually conflicting).

5. Free trade must be practised by one State, even if another State declines to do so in return.

6. Recourse must not be had to retaliative tariffs, the result of which must be to decrease imports.

7. Protection necessarily implies that the interests of certain classes of men are to be consulted to the detriment of the country at large, and that all are to be injured in order that a few may be favoured.

8. Excess of exports proves the indebtedness of a country.

With regard to the last proposition it can hardly be said that the excessive exports from England in 1871—1873 was in any true sense evidence of or the result of English indebtedness to foreign countries.

The statement with regard to protection excludes the idea of anything of the nature of a fair and reasonable protection, and begs a great part of the whole question by ignoring the grounds upon which a qualified and limited protection is at times advocated even by free-traders such as Mill.

With regard to the other propositions, Mr. Mongredien boldly asserts of countries what, speaking generally, would not command assent for a moment, if applied to individuals and their dealings: he ignores not only the fact that, as Mill points out, the capital of a country may be eventually diminished by the diminution of the means of saving, but also the effect of what Mill calls the desire for accumulation; and he entirely fails throughout to distinguish between what is reciprocal, sterling, and true free trade, and free trade which is one-sided, base and spurious; between protection which is justifiable and wise, and protection which is hurtful and unwise.

It is interesting, however, in passing, to observe that Mr. Mongredien, without expressing disapproval,

makes mention of the practice in some continental towns of imposing *octroi* duties, and appears to excuse this on the ground that these duties may be regarded as a source of revenue and not as being imposed for purposes of protection. Upon this admission it would appear that they are not justly to be called protectionists who would levy duties simply for fiscal purposes.

When we conclude the perusal of Mr. Mongredien's pamphlet there is a sharp feeling of disappointment and chagrin at not receiving from him the help and guidance which we had been fondly led to expect, and being left by him to wander in a hopeless desert, mocked as by some mimicking mirage.

In the consideration of the question of free trade there are certain things to be borne in mind which do not possess the attraction of novelty, but which nevertheless demand attention.

One of the sayings about names is more trite than true, for a name does very frequently carry with it a prejudice or a recommendation which is undeserved. Men know only too well that the success of a theory often largely depends upon the prejudice that can be raised in its favour by the successful naming of it. Against all prejudices of this sort we cannot be too strictly on our guard. "The natural or acquired partialities of mankind," Mill writes, "are continually throwing up philosophical theories, the sole recommendation of which consists in the promise they afford for proving cherished doctrines, or justifying favourite feelings; and when any one of these theories has been so thoroughly discredited as no longer to

serve the purpose, another is always ready to take its place. This propensity, when exercised in favour of any widely-spread persuasion or sentiment, is often decorated with complimentary epithets; and the contrary habit of keeping the judgment in complete subordination to evidence is stigmatised by various hard names as scepticism, immorality, coldness, hard-heartedness, and similar expressions, according to the nature of the case. . . . There are minds so strongly fortified on the intellectual side that they could not blind themselves to the light of truth, however really desirous of doing so: they could not, with all the inclination in the world, pass off upon themselves bad arguments for good ones." It is submitted that free trade is an instance of a sentiment which has been decorated with a complimentary epithet; and just as free trade has been unduly honoured and magnified, so protection has been unduly discredited and vilified. In every case we have to guard against prejudice, and look at things as they are, and not be alarmed at or carried away by mere names.

It may be pointed out also that it is nothing short of an arrogant presumption to assert, as is so frequently done, that our vaunted prosperity (the reality of which is somewhat doubtful) is wholly due to free trade, as though the progress of the sciences, the almost desperate industry of our people, and the marvellous development of the country's national resources resulting therefrom, had nothing whatever to do with the matter. While national expenditure under a Liberal Administration is increasing by leaps

and bounds, and national resources are daily diminishing, the false prophets of a distorted and suicidal free trade would do well not to be too over-confident about the country's prosperity, which, if it has any reality at all, is at present maintained only by making our own countrymen pass through the fire of a fierce and unequal struggle for existence. The pale faces, the hollow cheeks, the lack-lustre eyes of young men and women, who should be blithe and bonny, condemned by their rulers, who should be their thoughtful guardians, to cruel hardships, which eat out life and soul, duped, but striving, with all the dogged resolution of their race, to the bitter end, may well give us pause. There are many who do not despair of their country, who yet believe that the social fabric is suffering from decay, and needs to be reconstructed from its very base, so that the handicraftsman's status may be rendered not hopeless and intolerable, but honourable and independent.

Why will rulers act on theories that the least experienced housewife in her cottage, the tradesman at his counter, would not act on for one moment—theories which common sense (that most uncommon of things) and long and bitter experience have long ago exploded?

National prosperity is the collective result of a multitude of favourable circumstances, and to attribute it to free trade is to overlook the plurality of causes. "John Wesley, while he commemorated the triumph of sulphur and supplication over his bodily infirmity, forgot the resuscitating influence of four

months' repose from his apostolic labours ;" and semi-instructed minds, it has been said, are prone to explain complicated phenomena by a simpler theory than their nature admits of:—"When a multitude of particulars are presented to the mind, many are too weak or too indolent to take a comprehensive view of them, but confine their attention to each single point by turns."

It should be remembered, too, that in principle there is absolutely no distinction to be made between food and any other thing requisite and necessary for life. Exceptional circumstances may warrant exceptional interference in the case of any such necessary thing. It may be that at the time of the repeal of the Corn Laws the supply of corn was so restricted and limited with reference to the wants of the community as to constitute a virtual monopoly in the hands of British agriculturists, and to warrant the special interference of the Legislature in the supreme interest of the entire people—" *salus populi suprema lex.*" If this was the case to the extent then alleged, times and circumstances have since undergone a marvellous change ; and the question now is, not whether agriculturists are to have a monopoly, but whether British agriculture, iniquitously burdened and harassed, shall go down before its foreign competitors, who are admitted to compete with our own people on English ground and in English markets towards the maintenance of which they contribute nothing, but which are maintained at the expense, in great measure, of the very men against whom they are competing. The question now is, not whether the supreme interest of the community

is involved in the suppression of a monopoly, but whether its supreme interest is not to save from utter destruction an immense industry upon which, directly or indirectly, about one-half of the wealth of the country depends, and in the prosperity of which not one-half, but the whole, of the population is, one way or another, vitally interested. It is, at the very least, as important, both to the rich man and to the poor man, that English agriculturists should be placed upon a fair and equal footing with foreign agriculturists in English markets, as it ever was that the Corn Laws should be repealed, and that this should be done without a moment's delay.

Some three years ago it was heralded forth that hares and rabbits were indispensable for restoring the farmer's shattered fortunes. Then again a second Agricultural Holdings Act and providential seasons were the two things needful ; now, insufferable bathos, it is jam ! Was palsied invention ever so impotent ; was promised performance ever so lame and ineffectual ? The whole business, let who can deny it, is a mockery, a hollow cheat, a bitter jest from end to end. Where is the friendly hand when the distracted farmer seeks to protect his herd from desolating disease ? The too ready excuse comes pat upon the tongue for postponing the relief from burdens which his countrymen have adjudged he shall have, until maybe it is too late and there is no voice left to importune or to plead. That smooth-faced gentleman, tickling commodity, is at the bottom of it ; would that some lion-hearted Faulconbridge might come to smash and pulverise.

A groaning nation has to be raised up, and the sentiment of the country must not be stirred by a random song or a harrowing tale to charitable deeds, but must be propelled by the irresistible force of reason itself to acts of simple justice and to pluck up the evil by the root.

Justice was once said to be doing good to your friend and harm to your enemies ; free-traders say it is doing good to your enemies and harm to your friends. Why are men not true philosophers, like dogs, who know who are their friends and who are not ?

Of the remedies which have been proposed for the relief of the prevailing distress, two are engaging considerable attention at the present time.

One has been propounded by a man whose name shall not be recorded here, who, daring to invoke even the highest—

“ Thou, Diviner still,
Whose lot it is to be by man mistaken,
And Thy pure creed made sanction of all ill,
Redeeming worlds to be by bigots shaken,—”

proposes to confiscate all property, landed property first of all, and other property afterwards ; and this doctrine is based upon the very fanciful assumption that all property is simply theft. (He too, forsooth, is an ardent free-trader.) This remedy hardly merits consideration, and can scarcely be said to be yet within the domain of serious discussion. It is, however, astounding to find that men of position and standing, who should be men of sound judgment

and discretion, whose intelligence a grateful people rewards with its honourable patronage, coquet with and lend countenance to this ramping rascality, with blind infatuation seeing a thief and consenting unto him instead of stripping away the hollow mask and exposing the hideous antic that lurks beneath. Mr. Bright, conspicuously and to his lasting honour, has had the manhood and courage to step forth from the crowd and denounce a threatened crime. If we bow down to and embrace this strange God, we shall become the derision of our American brethren, who have cast him forth from their midst. It would involve the total repudiation of that purest of creeds which is so rashly and impiously appealed to. The choice is between Pentateuch and Pandemonium, between the commonest of common sense and desperate insanity. It cannot be in doubt which way men will decide.

The question has been asked by this skin-deep philosopher, do men create land in the same way that a man creates a table. The answer is, Yes—the landowner is as much a creator as the maker of a table is; the landowner does not indeed create, but finds, the soil or land in its natural prairie state; the carpenter, too, does not create, but finds the forest tree out of which the table is made: but it would be perfectly easy to prove, if it were necessary, in spite of questionings, that the reputed and ostensible owner of land has created or given to the land its value in just the same way and to the same extent that the carpenter has created or given its value to the table, and that the former is every whit as much entitled to his land

as the owner of a table is entitled to his table. In both cases the value is the result of capital, labour, and skill combined, the difference in the two cases being that the fact of creation is far more simple and self-evident in the one than in the other. The creation of a table occupies a day, week, or month, it may be, but the creation of land, as we now find it in England, has involved vastly more enterprise, and has been the work of many generations. Property in land and in manufactured articles is in principle absolutely identical and indistinguishable.

Another proposal is that the State should appropriate what is termed the unearned increment, and the doctrine of unearned increment is supposed to have special reference to land. But 'unearned increment' is not more applicable to land than to most if not to all other kinds of property, and it seems to be forgotten that land (notwithstanding Mr. Thorold Rogers' views to the contrary), like other property, is subject to sudden and serious decrement as well as increment in value. The doctrine of unearned increment is nevertheless an intelligible one, as it has been stated, still it is conceived to be both utterly unsound and also unlikely to square with prevailing ideas. If the matter is carefully sifted there is perhaps no property to which some unearned increment does not attach, and no unearned increment which has not somehow or other and at some time been earned either by a man's own exertion and industry, or by the prudence and foresight of his predecessors; and how will prudence and foresight be encouraged if their fruits

are to be subject to confiscation in favour of those who do not exercise these virtues, and who should suffer rather as a punishment for their faults? It is sometimes suggested that land is a unique species of property as being limited in quantity, and that it accordingly calls for special treatment. So far from this being a true statement of the case, land is in extent obviously the most unlimited of all things. All land may not be equally desirable or valuable, but this is the case with most if not all other things, and there is abundance of land to be found either near at hand or at a distance without coveting our neighbour's; in a word the suggested distinction between land and other property is in truth wholly fanciful and imaginary.

If the State collectively takes over property without just consideration, it is euphemistically described by those who are dissatisfied as confiscation; if an unfortunate individual takes over property on the same terms, outraged society and the criminal law very bluntly call it theft. The individual purges his fault by punishment and we have hopes of his future. The State goes on its way uncorrected, and in the end becomes hopelessly corrupted and ruined beyond all power of saving. From this there is no escape, though men shut their eyes to it as they may. The collective conscience is a tender thing, not lightly to be tampered with. It is a base and unworthy suggestion that men should take shelter under legislation, in order that they may commit wrongs from which the individual conscience recoils, and individual guilt becomes thereby not less but greater; and it is sheer

cowardice for men to yield thus to the tempter's fatal blandishments. Public men appear at times to vie with one another in offering wittingly or unwittingly big bribes to the mass of the people. The food of the people, say they, must not be taxed. That it should not be taxed—if by that term is meant improperly charged—everyone agrees. But they do not wait to demonstrate how food is in any particular—as they term it—taxed, or to inquire whether or not its distribution is only attended with natural and proper charges and expenses. If the housewife goes to the greengrocer she knows that she has to pay many legitimate charges beyond the prime cost of production, and she does so cheerfully; but when food is imported from abroad, some mysterious distinction is discovered between it and home produce, and while the one is admitted free the other is subjected to burdensome taxation.

It is submitted that a fair and proper charge is not a tax in the common acceptation of the term, or, in other words, that there may be a perfectly legitimate and defensible tax on all products, whether imported from abroad or not. To lay down the principle that the food of the people is not to be taxed, or to bear any kind of charge, is to preach "*panem et circenses*" and to corrupt a nation. It results in unduly taxing a portion of the community for the benefit of another portion of it, and so offers a direct premium to poverty. Every individual should be educated to bear his fair share of the public burden as a part of an Englishman's birthright. In Germany, the home of patriots, every

man is entrusted with the safety of his country ; in England, the home of liberty, men are being taught to shirk the duties and responsibilities of free men. But it is contended (and an attempt is made later on to prove) that the so-called free-traders' views as to the effect of the imposition of a charge on imports are altogether erroneous, and that far from causing an injury to the community, the imposition of a fair and reasonable duty would, on the contrary, work a direct gain to all classes, making cheap instead of increasing the price of food, and tending to restore the capital and general wealth of the country, in consequence of which employment would be forthcoming for the wage-earning classes, large numbers of whom are at the present time in direst extremity. But even assuming that with fair and reasonable duties on imported food bread were somewhat dearer than it is (and it is somewhat confidently predicted that such would not be the case), it would be much easier for a man to buy a loaf for sevenpence which he can well afford, than to have loaves down to fivepence and no fivepence wherewith to buy. In the one case the man is well off, in the other he is in the way of starvation. In the one case the loaf at sevenpence is cheapness itself, in the other the loaf at fivepence is a world too dear, at a time when fivepence is in a manner of speaking worth any money.

The so-called free-trader also either knows or should know that there is no such thing as absolute cheapness whether of bread or of anything else, but that cheapness is relative to and depends on many circumstances,

and yet he either foolishly or wickedly puts forward his case as if this were not so. The fact that bread is a trifle cheaper now than it was thirty years ago proves absolutely nothing of itself in favour of free trade; and if it is asserted that the artizan is well off because he can purchase his loaf for fivepence, while he has at the same time to pay dearly for a roof to cover him by night, or for a coat to put on by day, such an assertion is a heartless mockery; and the spurious free-trader who endeavours to teach the contrary to the masses who do not understand the matter, becomes a man not merely of darkness and misleading but of positive immorality. More than this, the too prevalent fashion of dealing with this question is not only an insult to the understandings of the poorer members of the community, but the unwarrantable assumption involved that they are to be treated as though different in kind from other men and not sharing in the rights, privileges and responsibilities of the common country, is an insult to their dignity as citizens, and hardly betokens gentle manners on the part of their patronising superiors. If all men were called upon to bear their just and fair share of the burdens as well as to share in the privileges of the community, instead of, in some cases, being pampered and spoilt and wrapped in swaddling clothes, and, in others, ground down and oppressed, then a greater sense of fellowship and more fellow-feeling would prevail, and while abject poverty would be well-nigh impossible, a fervent charity and generous assistance, public or private or both, alike honourable and ennobling to the giver and to the

receiver, would in cases of genuine and unmerited misfortune ever be ready at hand.

But if the poor are really to be protected, why does the Government fail to redress their manifest wrongs ; why does it permit, for instance, the sale of poisonous liquors, a gross libel on good malt and hops, and suffer breweries, like bastiles, to grow to be a public shame and court a day of judgment ? Why is the breakfast-table too often laden with abominations called bread and butter and coffee ; and why does the doughty champion of the free but unwholesome breakfast-table find soft words to salve this festering sore ? These are not, as free trade at first sight appears to some to be, difficult and doubtful, but very simple matters to understand ; and while such things are tolerated, even vice itself, which we are complacently accustomed to call hideous, is encouraged to think that in such company it is not after all so very vicious. To the vicious vice certainly is not, all of it, hideous ; and we hardly avail ourselves of the best means of promoting virtue by simply being content with abusing vice.

Mr. Bright has been understood to justify adulteration as being only a species of competition, but that is little consolation to the sufferers by it, and a greater than Mr. Bright has called it a particular kind of falsehood. Even a virtuous Government are for debasing the coinage, and would take away from the British sovereign his good name and make him poor indeed—

“ You have beguiled me with a counterfeit
 Resembling majesty, which being touch'd and tried,
 Proves valueless.”

The wage-earning class are chiefly interested in the issue of light half-sovereigns, and it is doubtful whether they will be content to take dross for gold, make a loan of 10 per cent. without return, to a Government in which they have slender confidence, and get in place of 10s., to which they have become entitled, some counterfeit presentment worth 9s. only. Who would *give* a breed of barren metal to his friends? Has free trade brought even Liberals to such a pass as this?

Why, again, is it contended that food alone should be cheap, seeing that clothing is equally a necessary of life, and both have to be paid for out of the same pocket? But if clothing remains dear instead of becoming cheap, the fund available for the purchase of food is diminished through the cost of clothing, and food becomes thereby dearer to the purchaser, whose means of purchasing are diminished.

But to return. The chief objection which is usually urged against the imposition of duty on corn is that the duty would in fact be paid by the consumer and not by the foreign importer, the latter of whom would raise the price to cover duty. We are not always right in those inferences which appear to us the most irresistible, and this proposition may be disputed. For let it be assumed that the conditions of agriculture in England are such that the English farmer can afford to grow wheat at 42s. a quarter, but that he cannot profitably do so at a lower price. So long as the English farmer is not beaten out of the market and 42s. is the irreducible minimum price, the foreigner

will obtain for his wheat about the market price of 42s. a quarter. Now let it be assumed again, for argument's sake, that the cost price of production of foreign wheat as placed upon the English market by the foreign producer has been 24s. a quarter, in that case there would be a clear profit for him of 18s. a quarter, if he sells at the market price of 42s. Now if the foreign producer should be charged, not with a protecting duty, but with a duty of say 6s. a quarter, what is the result? The cost price to him is raised from 24s. to 30s., and instead of clearing a profit of 18s. a quarter, he takes the very handsome profit of 12s. He is at the same time precluded from raising his price beyond 42s., because of the market price of English wheat; he therefore cheerfully takes 12s. profit, since he can get no more, pays as he ought to do for the use of the English market, which has been established at great cost to the English [people, and the consumer (to say nothing of other advantages) gets his loaf for the same price as before and does not, as is asserted would be the case, pay any of the duty placed on the imported corn.

But if it is true that the imposition of a suitable duty is not injurious to the consumer (and Mill appears to admit that it does not necessarily raise the price of corn), but is even beneficial to him, it will still be urged that the imposition of a duty will ultimately benefit the landlord, and this to many is a sufficient and insuperable objection. In answer to this, it is contended that if the landlord should be benefited thereby—a result to be devoutly desired—all who

understand the question know well enough that he will be the last of those who are immediately interested to receive his share of the benefit, and that long before he derives any advantage from the change the tenant-farmer and the agricultural labourer must be largely profited, and, through them, the entire community. And what reason upon earth can be given to show that the landlord alone ought not to share in the otherwise common benefit? But if the landlord should be benefited, the community is in consequence immediately benefited thereby, for prosperity acts and reacts with electrical rapidity. It is foolish to cut off the nose to spite the face ; and the truth is, that the dead set against landlords, having no just foundation, is nothing short of a disgrace to the present generation, and in kind is not distinguishable from that persecution of the Jews, which is a blot even upon the dark ages. To this unmanly attitude we have probably to attribute Mill's statement (improved upon by Mr. Thorold Rogers) that landlords "grow richer, as it were, in their sleep, without working, risking, or economising"—a statement altogether remote from the truth, but which would, if it were true, be equally true of all other owners of capitalised property whatsoever. To nineteen-twentieths at least of landed property in England the statement is as inapplicable as it could well be ; and if anyone imagines that landlords in rural districts at the present day neither work, risk, nor economise, but simply "sleep and snore, and rend apparel out," they can scarcely be said to appreciate the situation. The fact is that, instead of landlords

growing richer, land in rural districts has decreased in marketable value by at least one-half within the last ten years, and this only represents a small part of the landlord's misfortunes. But if it be granted that one-twentieth part of the land of England situate in the neighbourhood of great towns, has in recent years increased greatly in value, almost all other kinds of property in and about our great towns have, owing to the increase in, and the combined industry of, the population, increased in value *pari passu* and in a like ratio. And if the present owners (who generally contribute themselves to the result far more than is popularly supposed) should not have contributed to the extent which, at first sight, might be expected of them, there appears to be no reason why they, more than others, should be deprived of the advantages which accrue to them, it may be, from the prudence or energy of their predecessors, or even of their share of good luck.

But if it has been proved that the imposition of a fair and reasonable duty on corn does not necessarily increase the cost of bread to the consumer, what are some of the advantages which will flow from the imposition of it? The following may be mentioned:—

1. Taxation will be reduced to the relief of the community generally.
2. An impetus will be given to flagging industries.
3. The prospects and condition of the industrial classes will in consequence be improved.
4. Agriculture, the largest industry of all, in the prosperity of which the whole community is vitally

interested, and which is at present crushed by the burdens imposed on it, will revive in some measure.

5. The rural population (which to the detriment and danger of the State seems now doomed to extinction, owing to the decay of agriculture) will be gradually restored.

6. A virtual monopoly of the supply of corn in the hands of the foreigner, with which we are threatened at no distant date, and the perils of which are too obvious to be enumerated, may be averted.

It will not, perhaps, be thought inappropriate to mention the authority of Mill on two points. He says (1) "Over-taxation carried to a sufficient extent is quite capable of ruining the most industrious community;" and (2) "If a tax be laid upon corn, the rise of price may operate to raise wages so as to compensate the labourers for their portion of the tax." As to the first of these statements, it is submitted that English agriculture is now on the high road to ruin from the very cause mentioned; and as to the second, it shows that Mill did not agree with those who assert that a duty which increases the price of corn must be injurious to the labouring classes.

It is important to notice also, that Mill actually advocates reciprocity and defends the imposition of non-protecting duties (*i.e.*, duties which do not raise the price of commodities and exclude foreign imports) in cases where a foreign country will not correspondingly forbear to impose revenue duties.

These are some of the opinions of the man who has found rest in the pantheon of those who lay claim to

liberal ideas, and who was wont to be regarded as the high priest of free-traders ; but now even he is set at nought and exclaimed against by heated zealots, because he did not gulp down the gilded pill without pulling one wry face and bend a supple knee to every boundless extravagance.

Now, if the free-traders' proposition that the imposition of a duty must result in the increased cost of the article to the consumer were found to be true, it would naturally be supposed that the converse proposition would be true also, and that the removal or reduction of a duty must lessen the cost. But this is found not to be the case. The reduction of duty on sugar and tea, for instance, has not resulted in an equivalent reduction in the cost of these articles to the consumer. For, on the testimony of competent judges, the reduction has resulted rather in the increase of the profits of the producer and trader, who have either not reduced prices at all, or else by some process such as what is euphemistically called "blending," have maintained prices while professing to reduce them ; and perhaps such reduction of price as can be fairly proved has after all been attributable not so much to the reduction or abolition of duty as to competition compelling merchants to trade at smaller profits. And besides, it would appear that customary prices have in them a validity and prescriptive force such that they are not easily varied by the variation in the cost of production (of which duty forms part), and that prices have a controlling effect even upon production itself not less powerful perhaps than that

which production has on prices. If an illustration of this were needed, we might point to the existence of what may be styled the customary price of fish and the effect it has in limiting the production or supply of fish, with a view to and in order to maintain its customary price; or, we may point to the fact that meat does not vary in price to the consumer to anything approaching the extent of the variation in the prime cost of the production of it to the producer. On the contrary the prices usually vary only in an unimportant degree; and it is well known that when the cost of production is low, the butcher or the baker, as the case may be, makes his gains, charging his customers much the same price as previously, but that when the cost of production is high, the butcher and baker in their turn are sufferers, experience teaching them that they cannot proportionately advance their prices to meet the increased cost. And so it is that increased cost of production does not by any means necessarily imply increased cost to the consumer, as is so frequently and confidently asserted, but on the contrary it may result simply in a reasonable reduction in the profits of the producer in the first instance, while it may further result in an increased production by him for export to other parts to make up for diminished profits in his previous markets.

But it should not be forgotten that the producer is also a consumer, and that, in the case of agricultural products, the producer is not the farmer alone, but that under the denomination of producer are included farm labourers and their households also, who

themselves constitute no insignificant portion of the consuming population, of which they will, doubtless, very shortly give convincing proof. It is idle, therefore, to draw a distinction and contrast between producer and consumer as though they were mutually antagonistic and mutually exclusive the one of the other, or to imagine that in laying burdens on agriculture the producer can be taxed while the consumer goes free.

Free trade is, after all, not such a very complex and difficult thing to understand, as is very commonly supposed; and much of the difficulty that does attach to the subject vanishes when we observe that, though always one thing in principle, it is found in practice not to be fixed and invariable, but relative to varying times, places, and circumstances; and so, although it may be somewhat difficult to formulate a definition of free trade which shall be in every case accurate, concise, and satisfactory, still a mere novice may understand what is not free trade, which, for practical purposes, comes to nearly the same thing. The meaning of this will perhaps be made clearer by what follows.

Free trade too is not, as we might almost be led by some to suppose, an unanalysable, impenetrable conception, to be wholly accepted or wholly rejected, like mind or matter, life or soul, as to which all that can be said has been condensed into the one sentence:

“Though what *is* soul, or mind, their birth or growth,
Is more than I know—the deuce take them both.”

Neither is it an abstruse thing, and a subject simply for abstract speculation, like justice, temperance, virtue,

happiness. It is eminently a simple idea, and one which may be reasoned about as easily as most things if we will but think of what it is. But men are now taught to think little, or not at all, and the consequence is that they think less than they ever did, so that ignorant assertion suffices to produce belief, and the wildest theories are accepted upon the flimsiest and meanest authority—

“It is not meant to be understood,” said Atropos; “but you must nevertheless believe it.” “I make it a rule only to believe what I understand,” replied Proserpine.

Cobden and his followers, no doubt, reasoned on free trade in his day. We of the present day do not reason on free trade, and lack the wit to adapt its principles to our own time and to altered circumstances. Free trade is not just what any person chooses to call it. The Romans made a wilderness, and called it peace; free-traders are like to make a wilderness and call it plenty.

Let us premise that championing the world that we might keep alive the clear tones of freedom (or peradventure in the prosecution of unrighteous wars brought about, it may be, by the apathetic and criminal indolence, by the incapacity or the wretched muddling of some miserable minister, intent on place, too little intent upon the country's grief and weal), we have incurred a national debt (which our free-traders do not propose that we shall repudiate), and that in consequence, because trade follows the flag, or for some other reason, we have, as one of the results of the outlay, provided a great market for the other nations

of the globe: are these other nations to use our market without contributing aught to the expense and outlay in establishing and maintaining it? The free-trader answers "Yes, and it is better for the English people they should do." Let us leave the consideration of this for the present, and let us for a few moments suppose some worthy London citizen having capital and seeking a use for it: let this same worthy citizen proceed to the Poultry, and let him be zealous to serve his fellow-citizens with the best of food at reasonable prices. He finds premises that are just the very thing. He seeks out the landlord, takes a lease and pays a good stiff rent. Then, as a good citizen should do, he contributes liberally to the rates; he furnishes his establishment at considerable cost and engages an expensive staff of cooks and waiters and other servants. To all of which we say, very good. Now our worthy citizen in order to succeed, and we all wish him success, has to obtain a sufficient return from his business to pay firstly his rent, secondly rates, thirdly the general expenses of his establishment, fourthly a moderate rate of interest on the capital invested, equal to that which it would have brought him in if not invested in business, and fifthly a reasonable profit in addition, to remunerate him for his energy and skill in the conduct of his business. And we all agree that this is nothing more than what is fair and right. We need not just yet call it free-trading or fair-trading, for we are not now concerned with names but with things as they are. Who is there who would have the hardihood to contest the

justice on a whole of this state of things? Is there anyone so foolish as to suppose that a candidate for the good citizen's vote would be rash enough to assert in public that our good citizen ought to charge his customers so much only as would leave him a bare profit on his wares and no more, charging nothing to cover expenses for rent, rates, wages, wear and tear, and the like? If he should assert this, honest men would not listen to him; they would say that the proposal was unjust, that if insisted on it would be sheer confiscation and a making over of our good citizen's property by degrees to his customers. But it may be said, however bad this may be for our good citizen, it will be an excellent thing for his customers. This, however, is an argument which the straightforward citizens will not listen to either. Ah! but says the wily adversary, in the case you are putting, it is the consumer who is being taxed by the good citizen of the Poultry, but what we want to consider is the proposal which is being made to tax the foreign producer. To which objection we shall reply, that in the first place we are dealing with the abstract principles of our science, which when established we will apply, and in the second place it matters but little perhaps whether the tax is levied on the consumer or the producer, for, say free-traders themselves, a tax levied on the producer ultimately falls on the consumer.

Again, let us suppose two neighbouring farmers in the same parish (if the fastidious free-trader will condescend to contemplate for a few moments such

very objectionable persons); one of them shall be called to a strict account for rent and rates, tithe and taxes, while his neighbour shall not only be allowed to go scot free, but shall be allowed to derive his full share of the benefit from the rates and taxes paid by the other; and while the first man shall be charged a toll for his stall on the Corn Exchange, the other shall be invited to come smug upon the mart without bearing any charge whatsoever. We cannot doubt that this would become a topic at the market ordinary, but we are not now concerned to drop in and hear whether the farmers regard it as free-trading or fair-trading; for we are dealing just now not with names but with things as they are, and we will find the proper names for them by-and-by. There can be no doubt that the general common-sense verdict would be that the one man was hardly treated and might very well complain. He will certainly become very lean and his fellow well-liking; and if things are not altered, the good honest man (if he does not rebel, and we wish him God speed, if he should) will sooner or later go to the wall, not through his own fault, but owing to the callousness, indifference, and injustice of those who should have been the true guardians of his interests.

But it will doubtless be further objected that all this may be very well as applied to the common business of life, but that the business of nations is transacted on very different principles: for a nation, it will be said, must shape its conduct, not with reference to common-place experience, but by the perfect rule of

theory, be the consequences what they may. The lamentable consequences of this theorising are, however, just what plain men would expect. The nation is, in a word, carrying on under the colour of free trade a huge gambling speculation, thus setting the worst possible example to individual men to do the like : up to the present, the speculation has not turned out well ; but in the spirit of the gambler, we are for doubling the stakes instead of pocketing our loss.

Look at the matter as we may, the fact cannot be disguised that agriculture is frightfully and scandalously oppressed by unjust and unnecessary taxation and burdens, so that this, the largest and chief industry, is drooping to death, and threatened with speedy and fatal paralysis. Capital is dwindling, and employment is scarce and uncertain, so that many an honest man among the labouring classes is in doubt from day to day where he may look even to earn distressful bread. This need not and ought not to be.

But the evil is not confined to agriculture. It is the common complaint of all sorts and conditions of men, that we tax our own kith and kin, our own flesh and blood, in order that the foreigner may go free ; and the demand is daily growing louder and louder that all who use our markets, whether native population or foreign people, should be taxed alike, thus avoiding even the suspicion of protection, unless it be a just and fair protection.

The advocates of free trade are accustomed to assume that we are enjoying free trade, and to dwell

upon the innumerable benefits we are supposed to have derived from it. It is now, however, discovered that we have, as yet, never enjoyed the blessings of free trade. Free-traders consequently bestow their encomiums not on free trade, but on something other than free trade; and if this is so, then free trade, it must be inferred, is, according to them, not the thing to be highly praised, but that which is not free trade, which is, it would appear therefore, absurd. And so there is a lurking suspicion that in most of the talk about free trade there is "a conceit of knowledge which is a disgraceful sort of ignorance."

And now, it will no doubt be said, all that has gone before does not so much explain what free trade is, as what it is not; and this was indeed the kind of explanation to be sought for, what is commonly spoken of as free trade being in fact not some fixed and definite thing, but like many other things a shifting idea, which is made to mean by one person one thing, by another person another, and even different things by the very same persons at different times.

That the principles of a true free trade instead of a spurious free trade should be clearly understood and accepted is a matter not merely of a somewhat narrow national interest, but of international, or if it is preferred (for we are not to be daunted by a mere name), of cosmopolitan interest. For reckless trading on the part of one nation is a direct incentive to excessive greed as well as other shortcomings on the part of the nations that take advantage of it, and so the evil in course of time exacts and reacts with a fatal certainty,

to the detriment of all. The recognition therefore of the true principles of free trade on this ground alone cannot fail to contribute to general international good.

We are again brought back to the question, where shall we seek for a true exposition of the subject of our enquiry? The following was the sad and prophetic experience of a great thinker :—

“I found that the men most in repute were almost the most foolish ; and that some inferior men were really wiser and better.”

These words have a special application to the question of free trade, for the men most in repute among us utterly fail us. We find that even Mr. Bright is anything but a living and consistent example of the principles he professes. He is a man of peace, but his nostrils are ever distended with the breath of battle, and in his tones is the clear clarion note of strife ; but—

“Who shall study to prefer a peace,
If peaceful ‘*quakers*’ take delight in broils.”

As with peace so with free trade : it is ever on his tongue, but he is not diligent to insist on his own countrymen’s just claim to a reciprocal recognition of it by foreign countries. A great people loves to be led by great leaders ; but then they must be men who, to use the words of another, will guard the point of honour of their nation, and will yet discuss complicated questions as they arise with calmness and justice, and in the spirit of peace and high persuasion. The man who is always listened to, but hardly ever

convinces, holds not an enviable position among his fellow-men ; and to resort to unbridled vituperation is but to—

“Demean oneself,
Unlike the ruler of a commonwealth.”

Lord Salisbury in a recent speech expressed the opinion that if Pitt had had to deal with free trade, he would have dealt with it purely as a matter of international agreement, and thus he would have secured doubly undoubted blessings, not only because he would have given free trade to the world, but because we should have received it ourselves. It would doubtless have been well for us if Pitt had dealt with it, for it is impossible even to look upon the great Englishman who placed his country before all other things, and whose every lineament bespeaks the paragon of men, without at least a momentary inspiration and a conviction of his unrivalled capacity.

If it should be further asked—but what remedy is proposed ? The answer is indicated in the following proposition. If there is to be a free trade, let us see to it that we get free trade indeed and in very truth, no mere make-believe ; and let us insist that foreign countries shall not be favoured at the expense of our own people ; and if there is any real doubt as to whether we are acting generously towards foreign nations without being just towards our own people, let there be an immediate and searching enquiry, and let the question be once for all set at rest. We must no longer remain satisfied with rabid theories of transcendental cosmopolitanism, but must, in this matter of

free trade, take as our guide bitter experience, that "chief philosopher, saddest when his science is well known."

It has been said that there is a species of epigrammatic statement which is frequently mistaken for argument. To such devices has the modern free-trader recourse. But in the place of misleading epigram, a simple and straightforward meaning must be given to free trade; there must be honest speaking, and no attempt to complicate the matter and make it unintelligible; free trade must be read in the vulgar tongue, so that it may be understood of the people. It is high time that there should be an end to the mysticism in which it has been enveloped, and which has degraded it to the level of a fetish. It must no longer be tolerated that the English people should be ruined rather than that the error of a sect should be exposed, and that the nation should become the laughing-stock of the world just to gratify the vanity, or, it may be, the cupidity of baseless theorists and professional politicians. One fool maketh many, and men feverishly follow after blind leaders in the universal race for position among their fellows; and the too frequent result is reckless hurry-scurry, immature and mischievous legislation, which ignores principles, renders progress impossible, and threatens the perdition of an empire and a people.

The great thinker of old, condescending once to explain the method he adopted, said that in the first place he grappled to his soul with hoops of steel some principle which he judged to be the strongest; and

free-traders might have done worse than follow his example; but it may well be doubted whether their tattered semblance of a principle, the much-vaunted travesty of free trade, insincere and inconsistent, does not after all involve the most pestilent proposition that even political economists ever propounded, and (to use the language of the chief of the free-traders, with which not long since he did not scruple to cast a mean and unmerited slur upon the fair fame of him whose master tongue is silent, but whose patriot soul sleeps well) the rankest also of all the rank impostures that have in recent years been palmed off upon a too-confiding people. Certain is it that the number is daily increasing of those who regard the free trade of the reputed free-trader as a kind of abomination of desolation—a monster Moloch, more insatiable of the life of innocents than the bull of Phalaris, the car of Juggernaut, or the slaver of the Soudan, for not a single one escapes from its baleful scope.

If people did but understand their wrongs, they would flood patient Parliaments with petitions of their rights and clamour till they got them.

‘Non leve quiddam interest inter humanæ mentis
idola, et divinæ mentis ideas’

June, 1884

APPENDIX.

“ECONOMICS AND THE TARIFF QUESTION.

“42, HALF-MOON STREET,

“PICCADILLY, W.

“29th September, 1903.

“GENTLEMEN,—When abroad I read your letter to the *Times* of the 15th ult.

“I had previously been asking myself and others over and over again in relation to the great Fiscal question, where are the learned Professors of Political Economy who have been entrusted with and who have undertaken the solemn responsibility of teaching, *ex cathedrâ*, the young men of England at our great and ancient seats of learning—when lo, the remarkable *pronunciamento* of the 15th August. O ye shades of Plato and Aristotle, Bacon and Mill, how are ye racked and tortured by your faithless followers, who profanely worship at your shrines yet impiously reject the pure light of your eternal truths for the vile offscouring of an outworn, deadly creed? For what purpose did ye live and labour? Where is your light that illumined a world of ignorance? Alas, it is out and gone, and blackest darkness once again reigns in its stead. Prejudice, the canker of reason, is rampant; free trade receives a new blessing from a new generation of teachers, and protection is condemned beforehand and unheard; and this needs must be as thought itself, forsooth, will have it so. Now, Diogenes, light up your lantern and go about and see, if you can, where thought is to be found in all this. When found, tell us if it is designed to aid and settle or only to burke, stifle, and kill honest inquiry. Of a truth, that which should be demonstrated is assumed by our masters, beginning where they should end; and the necessary inference is that they are themselves profoundly ignorant of the very first principles, the maxims, the axioms of the science they arrogantly profess. Now, it is agreed

that it is very desirable our professors, to whom we look for light and leading, should co-operate in our inquiry, and we earnestly invite them to do so. A straight line is capable of exact definition. Free trade is also equally capable of clear and precise definition, otherwise we cannot talk, much less think, about it rationally; and if our professors cannot define it for us, then who can? Indeed, all things about which we think and reason are capable of clear, definite, and precise definition, otherwise they are meaningless to us and mere nonentity; and this is equally and absolutely true of protection, of free trade, and of thought itself. Now here you, our teachers, can, if you only will, aid and assist as none others can. We therefore beg and pray of you that you will each severally and separately supplement your manifesto and send to the *Times* your independent definitions of (1) Free Trade, to which you pin your faith; (2) Protection, which you utterly abhor; and (3) that new kind of thought (be it process of metaphysics, *à priori*, inductive, deductive, mental activity, or what not) which has, so you allege, been exercised by some great ones unnamed, and whose conclusions on the subject should be held to preclude all further thought with respect to it by all other persons for all future time. Oh that we might know these excellent men (nay, beings superior to men) to whom you, our masters, and we must render blind, unreasoning homage and obedience for all time, in all places, and in all circumstances. But these common-place things, free trade, protection, thought, so glibly talked of by all alike, must at least be clearly defined in your own minds, else could you not talk or think about them with any clear and definite meaning to yourselves, which we must all agree would be absurd. Now, if these things can be clearly defined, as of course they can, all the fourteen definitions of the fourteen several professors will necessarily be the same in substance and in fact, just as fourteen separate definitions of a straight line by fourteen different educated persons, all knowing what a straight line is, would be the same. But, if I ask too much, let our fourteen professors who have banded themselves together select one of their number, who shall represent the whole, and by whom the whole shall be bound, and let him send to the *Times* his definitions of the three things postulated by them. We shall then at least know what they themselves precisely mean by the things they talk of. But, if they refuse, then let them for ever

hereafter keep silence, be discredited in the face of their own disciples and ourselves, and never for the future mention the name of Sophist except with trembling, bated breath. But we will assume that our professors are eager, in the interest of knowledge and science and truth, to table their definitions, either separate or joint. I then propose that such definitions shall be submitted to some competent body of arbitrators (publicly recognised thinkers of unquestioned authority, two to be named on either side), and their umpire, whose duty it shall be to publicly decide upon such definitions, and who shall also state in the columns of the *Times* whether such definitions of our professors are or are not true definitions, with liberty to state the reasons for their decisions; and if such definitions shall be held by them to be substantially true and to be axioms of the greatest generality, then I will myself forfeit £50; but, if judgment shall go against them, let them pay a like forfeit; should, again, the verdict be in their favour, they or either of them notwithstanding to forfeit £10 as often as any one or all of them shall be convicted before the same court of thereafter using either of the above terms in a sense contrary to their own true definitions.

“Scientific conclusions, to be of any worth, must, as is universally acknowledged, be derived from principles, maxims, axioms of the highest generality, and are not the private dogmas of any *coterie*, however distinguished. The greatest principles have to be constantly and watchfully checked; even the law of gravitation itself is every moment of our lives being overpowered by a greater force operating in a contrary direction. I beg and pray, then, of our professors to enter the arena, buckle themselves to the task, and bring their noses to the grindstone like ordinary mortals, not hugging to themselves ideas as intangible and shifting as clouds far away out of our reach, repeating *ad nauseam* an antiquated jargon unintelligible to plain common folk (if not to themselves), and exhibiting a travesty of knowledge in place of the real thing. They will perhaps also tell us why, according to their doctrine protection should, in the matter of trade alone, be sheer damnation, when in other matters to afford protection savours of the loftiest virtue, while unrestricted freedom is, on the contrary, as often justly reprobated? Is not the reason plainly this, that in economics ‘protection’ and ‘free trade’ have become in the present

day (in some cases unwittingly, in others intentionally) mere terms of untruthful and dishonouring cant?

“I beg to draw attention to one other point of the greatest importance which would require much space to adequately discuss. You expressly reserve ‘the rule of taxation for the sake of revenue only.’ I ask you if you can make the application of this rule square with your axioms of free trade? I confidently submit you cannot, and that instinctively feeling the disastrous consequences which your false and untenable propositions would bring upon you, you thus provide yourselves with a loop-hole and means of escape from the ludicrous position in which the strict and logical application of your doctrines would inevitably land you.

“Yours faithfully,

“J. A. NEALE.

“Professor Edgeworth and his co-signatories.”

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